

TESTIMONY ON HCR 28 FOR HOUSE LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMITTEE  
December 7, 2016

Mr. Chairmen and Members of the Committee,

My name is Rev. Rob Cook, I speak against House Concurrent Resolution No. 28. I oppose the resolution because it asks Congress to halt the resettlement of refugees in our country. I believe our government can find ways to resettle refugees safely in our country, and that this is important because we have a spiritual and ethical mandate to do so.

I am the Senior Pastor of a United Methodist congregation just south of downtown Lansing, on the corner of Mount Hope Avenue and Cedar Street. Our congregation has been on that corner for over one hundred years and has served generations of families from all over the Lansing area. But over the last fifteen years, our church has grown to welcome families from all over the world. Over one hundred of our four hundred members were not born in the United States. They come from countries in the Middle East, like Syria and Iraq. They come from many parts of Africa, like the Congo and Liberia. Many of them arrived here with their families, so we have men, women, children, and adolescents who have become a vital part of our congregation. Most of them are refugees.

I stand to tell you what a gift they have been to our one-hundred-year-old congregation. They have reenergized our church. They serve on our church committees and sing in our church choirs. Their children fill our Sunday School classes, and their youth fill our church bus. They learn English far

more quickly than I learn Swahili, French, or Arabic, and they have shared their cultures while learning ours. All of them are deeply grateful to have been granted safety in our country as refugees. Our community is an answer to prayer for them, after a lengthy vetting process finally brought them here to Lansing.

I speak in opposition to House Concurrent Resolution 28 because it would hurt not only refugee families, but because it would also hurt our communities, our churches, and our country as a whole. We benefit from refugees who gratefully come to our country, and our church is a shining example of that. Our congregation is far better off because of these refugee families, and we need to love them not fear them.

As a person of faith, this is an imperative for me. The Bible I read and the sacred texts of many faith traditions all say the same thing. We are called to love our neighbor and welcome the immigrant. We are called to help people who need help, not only because we are people of faith, but because we are human beings. I understand our nation needs to have vetting procedures, and those procedures may need to be reviewed periodically. But this can be done without halting refugee resettlement. Too many lives depend on the safety our nation offers.

I would urge you not to move HCR 28 forward and would be open to any of your questions.